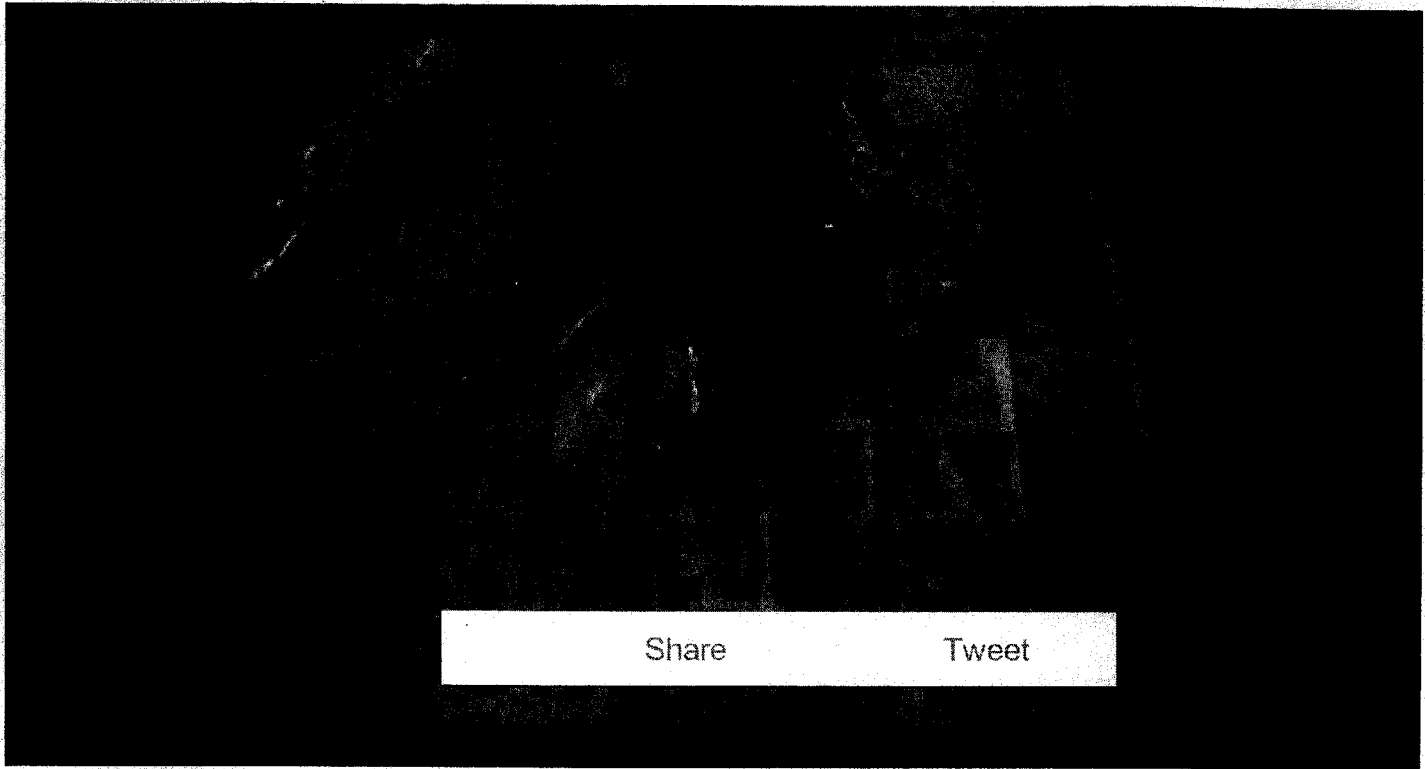


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Mexico Is Ready to End Failed Drug-War Policies—Why Isn't the U.S.?

CONOR FRIEDERSDORF | APR 30 2013, 6:30 AM ET



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Reuters

Did you know that the U.S. has been operating surveillance drones in Mexico, providing air support for the Mexican military, tracking the movements of Mexican citizens, sharing state-of-the-art spy technology with Mexican officials, and sending CIA agents to help Mexico train drug informants? Did you know the DEA has more employees stationed in Mexico than any of its other foreign posts? That Mexican nationals trained and bankrolled by the CIA raid Mexican drug cartels? Or that the CIA runs high-tech "fusion centers" in Mexico City, Monterrey and elsewhere?

"For the past seven years, Mexico and the United States have put aside their tension-filled history on security matters to forge an unparalleled alliance against Mexico's drug cartels, one based on sharing sensitive intelligence, U.S. training and joint operational planning," Dana Priest reports in the *Washington Post*. "But now, much of that hard-earned cooperation may

be in jeopardy." Enrique Pena Nieto, Mexico's new leader, reportedly dislikes the status quo, and was shocked, on taking office this December, at the degree of United States involvement in his country.

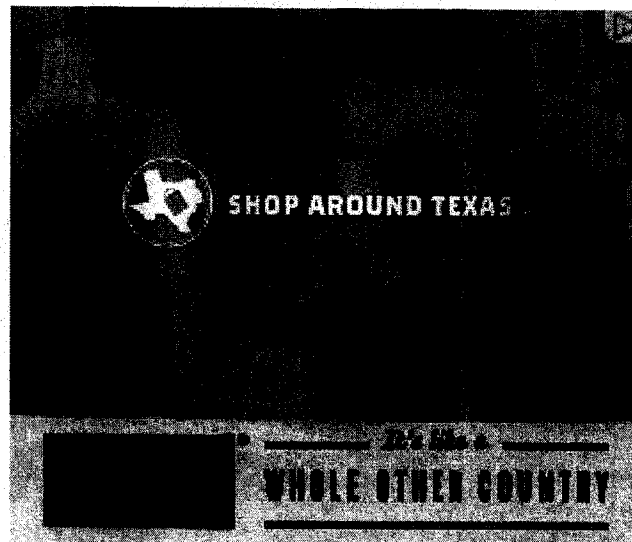
The article is worth reading in full.

What I can't help but remark upon is the way that it handles the spectacular failure of the War on Drugs. It notes "mounting criticism" that any success fighting cartel leaders has also helped to incite "more violence than anyone had predicted, more than 60,000 deaths and 25,000 disappearances in the past seven years alone." Put another way, the period of maximum American involvement has coincided with a horrific spike in drug-related violence.

"Meanwhile," Priest continues, "the drug flow into the United States continued unabated. Mexico remains the U.S. market's largest supplier of heroin, marijuana and methamphetamine and the transshipment point for 95 percent of its cocaine." So the strategy was high cost, low reward. It increased violence and did nothing to reduce the drug supply.

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Yet the fact that it completely failed plays basically no role in the rest of the article, in large part because everyone in the United States government apparently wants to preserve the failed status quo. American officials are very upset that Mexico's new leader has decided to go his own way.

Look at the very next sentences:

Mexican military with U.S. support. But stopping the cartel violence had become Peña Nieto's top priority during the campaign. The U.S. administration didn't know what that meant. Some feared a scaling back of the bilateral efforts and a willingness to trade the relentless drive against cartel leaders for calmer streets.

Does anyone else think that "a willingness to trade the relentless drive against cartel leaders for calmer streets" just might be "a quick, realistic alternative to Calderon's novel use of the Mexican military with U.S. support"? At the very least, it surely it doesn't make sense to presume, as the article seems to, that the obviously failed status quo is the most "realistic" way forward.

Sticking with it is arguably delusional. But that angle is seemingly never pursued. As ever, the utter failure of American drug policy is taken by the establishment as evidence that persisting is of even *more* importance. *The policies the United States pursued in Mexico as part of our increased role there coincided with a huge uptick in violence and no reduction in the supply of Mexican drugs? By God, let's hope that the Mexicans don't decide to try something completely different!*

It's the most irrational status-quo bias you're likely to find.

Given that Mexicans are the ones dealing with the dead bodies in the current arrangement, little wonder that they're able to appreciate the irrationality more than America's mystifyingly persistent drug warriors. Drugs can have awful affects all on their own. What's even worse are black markets in drugs. There's only one way to end them in a free country. And policymakers aren't open to it, despite the fact that ending prohibition would weaken the cartels more than anything.

So the carnage continues.

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